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ABSTRACT

In recognition of the uniqueness of the Native American cultures, University of the State of New York Regents have prepared an educational policy statement encompassing proposed action and providing for Native American cultural transition and adaptation without loss of cultural identity. The regents recommend that: (1) a Statewide Native American Education Advisory Committee be established to include representatives from each tribe and the off-reservation urban population; (2) Native American Advisory Boards be established for each tribal group; (3) school boards be urged to develop employment policies enabling more Native Americans to be employed as certified instructional and noninstructional personnel; (4) teacher training institutions develop courses relative to Native American cultural heritage; (5) elementary/secondary curriculums incorporate special bilingual/bicultural instructional programs and materials; (6) the Education Department promote and assist tribal communities in the development of continuing education programs; (7) postsecondary grant-in-aid programs extend opportunities to Native Americans on and off reservations; (8) postsecondary guidance counseling services be provided; (9) the State Education Department continue use of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' and U.S. Office of Education's supplementary education funds. (JC)

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NATIVE AMERICAN EDUCATION

A Statement of Policy and Proposed Action by the

REGENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
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THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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FOREWORD

New York State has been committed since 1846 to providing educational services for Native Americans residing on the State reservations and tribal lands. In the main, these services sought to enable Native Americans to move into the mainstream of American society. Even with the strong support of the State Education Department, it is evident that success has been limited.

The Board of Regents recognizes that Native American people in New York wish to retain their traditional culture and life styles and to blend these into the whole of American society. Therefore, educational programs must be designed to meet the diverse and special educational needs of the various tribal individuals and groups comprising the Native Americans of New York State.

This position paper presents a guide for policy whereby educational opportunities can be improved for present and future generations of Native Americans in New York State.

Ewald B. Nyquist

President of the University and
Commissioner of Education

INTRODUCTION

The State of New York has provided educational services to Native Americans residing on reservations and tribal lands for over a century and a quarter. The tribal groups comprising this population and referred to in this paper are the Six Iroquois Nations (Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora) and the Poospatuck and the Shinnecock.

The formal educational programs provided for Native Americans in New York State assumed that they desired to become assimilated into the dominant American society, while forsaking their tribal heritages. The Regents now recognize that these people prefer to retain their specific tribal cultural identities and life styles and that they wish to exercise the prerogatives of adopting only those components of the dominant American culture that meet their needs. In American history, the State and Federal attempts to terminate tribes, to dissolve their reservation status, and to relocate their people into urban settings have not been successful.

It is clear that Native Americans desire high quality of elementary, secondary, and continuing educational programs that will give them favorable opportunities in their pursuit of occupations, professions, and informed citizenship. To this end, educational programs should accommodate specific tribal cultural differences by attempting to provide bilingual and bicultural learning environments to be offered to students at their choice and which will enable the Native American to function more effectively in a pluralistic society.

Historically the State has provided special educational services only to the Native Americans residing on the reservations. The Regents recognize that the off-reservation and generally urban Native Americans are entitled to receive the same special considerations; hence directions advocated herein pertain in a different degree to Native American education wherever it may occur, on or off reservations. However, it is recognized that considerable local adaptation must occur in different situations and particularly where the Native American population is dispersed and in consequence removed from the tribal communities.

This statement was developed after consultation with Native Americans throughout New York State by means of meetings, review of draft papers, and dialogue with tribal chiefs, education leaders, parents, students and school officials from reservations and local contracting school districts.

The Board of Regents intend that provision be made for those educa-

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tional opportunities for Native Americans that meet their specific needs as a people and as members of American society.

RATIONALE

The basic attitudes and values that Native Americans hold in high esteem as they pertain to education can be found in the Board of Regents' document entitled, "Goals for Elementary, Secondary, and Continuing Education in New York State." All of the goals noted in that paper apply equally to the education of Native Americans. Their philosophies and those of the dominant society have much in common; however, the specific cultural differences, both subtle and overt, have generated misunderstandings that can, we believe, be minimized or eliminated by the development of appropriate educational programs.

Native American education in New York State is probably as old as American Indian life on this planet, which archaeological findings indicate has existed for some 30,000 years. In the pre-Columbian Native American community, education was the main social imperative. The social group as a whole provided the schooling for the mind and personality of the individual. The practical and the religious, the manual and the intellectual, the individual and the group were viewed as parts of an integrated function within the tribe. Recognizing the uniqueness of the Native American cultures, the primary goal of Native American Education in New York State is to provide a cultural transition, and the means of adaptation, without the loss of cultural identity.

The 1970 Census shows a New York State population of 28,350 Native Americans, of whom 10,950 are listed as residents of the major tribal groups—the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Poospatuck, Seneca, Shinnecock, and Tuscarora. The other 17,400 Native Americans live primarily in the State's urban areas. New York City's Native American population is listed as 9,994, Buffalo's as 2,199, and Syracuse's as 1,067. Significantly, it is reported that the majority of the off-reservation Native Americans maintain close cultural and kinship ties with their tribal communities, as manifested by frequent visits to their ancestral homes.

The 1974–75 ethnic census of the New York State Education Department's Bureau of Educational Data Systems indicates a Native American elementary and secondary school population of 5,830 children enrolled in 46 public school districts. Most of these children are located in the public schools on or near the eight reservations and in the State's largest cities. At present, the State Education Department is responsible for the education of approximately 2,990 elementary and secondary school students enrolled in reservation schools and in the schools of adjoining contracting districts. This census shows 312 Native Americans receiving

post-secondary New York State grants-in-aid during the 1974–75 school year, and approximately 50 Native Americans attending higher education institutions out-of-state.

Each tribal group of Native Americans in New York has its own traditional background of culture and heritage, which has been communicated orally over the centuries. In all cases, tribal language provides the basis for educational activity within the specific Native American culture. Accordingly, children of Native American culture face a difficult learning task in bridging from their local culture to the national culture, as they must do to achieve a full life in American society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Regents recommend that:

1. A Statewide Native American Education Advisory Committee be established to include representatives from each of the Six Iroquois Nations (Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora), the Poospatuck, and Shinnecock tribes, and representatives at large from the off-reservation urban Native American population. This advisory committee should be appointed by the Commissioner of Education from nominations received from these Native American groups. The advisory committee would be expected to advise and consult with the Commissioner of Education and his staff on educational policies and practices regarding the education of Native Americans in New York State. One result of this process will be the involvement of additional resources from the Education Department needed to meet the Statewide requirements of these people.

2. New and improved procedures be established whereby representatives of tribal communities and reservations can have greater involvement in decisions in the education of their children. Native American Advisory Boards should be established for each tribal group to work closely with the district superintendent of schools, the local school board, and the State Education Department in the operation and management of the elementary and secondary schools serving Native American children. The Regents believe that satisfactory experience with such advisory boards will provide a strong base for later consideration of alternative governing procedures designed to ensure the preservation and perpetuation of Native American cultural heritages in New York State.

3. School boards of all contracting school districts be urged to develop employment policies that will enable more Native Americans to be employed in those districts as certified instructional and noninstructional personnel. It is necessary that some Native American adminis-

trators, supervisors, teachers, pupil-services specialists, paraprofessionals, tutors, and language culture teachers be employed by those districts so that the educational needs of Native American pupils can be met more effectively.

4. A plan be developed that will enable selected teacher training institutions in New York State to provide courses and other teacher-training experiences that relate to the cultures and heritages of Native Americans. In addition, this plan should provide for the establishment of Statewide preservice and inservice teacher-training programs to assist those who teach Native American children.

5. The curriculum for elementary and secondary education in New York State be changed to assure maximum educational opportunities for Native American children. Development of special bilingual and bicultural instructional programs and materials is essential so that each Native American student can be provided with the opportunity to use his native tribal language and draw on his culture in an educational environment that increases his ability to learn. Native American Language and culture courses should be provided in the curriculums of all schools which enroll Native American children. To this end, Native Americans should advise staff in the State Education Department in the development of these programs and materials, and work with other officials, especially local, state and national Native American specialists in native cultures, language, art, music, government, and philosophy. Native Americans, both on and off reservations, tend to experience learning difficulties when cultural differences are not acknowledged and mitigated in the school curriculum. When these needs are met, Native American students will be better able to participate in certain optional learning environments and educational opportunities, thus enhancing their chances for successful adaptation to the whole American society.

Nothing stated in this section of any other part of this general statement should be interpreted to restrict or preclude the opportunity of those individuals who are generally described as Native Americans, or who identify themselves with one or another Native American group, to gain access without discrimination to the educational opportunity in the communities in which they find themselves. Specifically, those Native Americans who choose to use the American Educational system as an avenue for assimilation into the larger American culture—a culture consisting of varieties of ethnic and racial groups—must be free to do so. The choices of these individuals cannot and should not be in any way interfered with by the desire on the part of Native Americans who choose to use educational institutions for the perpetuation of their own culture.

6. The Education Department promote and assist the tribal communities and the schools serving them in the development and implementation of continuing education programs for all Native Americans. The educational environment for adult Native Americans is enhanced when Native American teachers work on a reservation setting or in a Native American cultural center. Basic education, tutoring, high school equivalency, cultural courses, economics, arts and crafts, trade and technical courses, as well as leadership and management training, are some of the offerings that should be given priority in these programs.

7. Postsecondary grant-in-aid programs be expanded to extend opportunities for New York State Native Americans on and off the reservations. These grants should reflect increases in postsecondary education costs. They should be coordinated with other State and Federal entitlement programs.

8. Native American guidance counseling services be provided so that students are aware of postsecondary education opportunities. Institutions of higher education that prepare guidance counselors should be encouraged to provide programs focusing on the value systems and the cultural backgrounds of Native Americans. Guidance counselors who at present serve Native Americans should be provided supplementary training in the field of Native American Education. Special "outreach" services should be provided to continue and enhance the work of the State-sponsored special opportunity programs, both public and private, which furnish access to collegiate opportunity for Native Americans in New York State. In those places where there are significant numbers of Native Americans, there should be designed summer pre-freshman bridge programs, remedial work, specialized counseling, and other support services.

9. The State Education Department be encouraged to continue recent successful efforts to use the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs' and the United States Office of Education's supplementary funding specifically designated to meet the special educational needs of Native Americans. The Johnson-O'Malley Act, H.E.W.- Special (TRIO) Service Programs, "The Right to Read" programs, Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Title VII, Bilingual Education Act are the major funding sources. The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 sets the major guidelines for implementation.

CONCLUSION

This position paper should be viewed as a general statement of policy for which new or amended legislation, Regents Rules and Commissioner's Regulations may be required. To make certain that the objectives of this paper are met, concerned parties must cooperate in a spirit of dedication and mutual trust.

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